

more gas for us when we could pump it ourselves.

I yield to the Senator from Alaska.

Mr. BEGICH. I thank my friend from Louisiana, and I will conclude by saying again that her point about being smart and strategic is what we are saying. No one is saying either/or, that it has to be this or that. It is a combination of things. Some will be more expensive today but maybe less later.

Think about the technology around the cell phone the first time it came out, which used to be a box about this big, and you plugged it in your car and the big receiver would be in your trunk. It cost several thousand dollars to buy that technology, if you remember, and people were saying: No one is ever going to do that. Now you can go to the 7-Eleven—or in my State it would be the Holiday store—and buy throwaway phones. It is amazing what can happen when you allow some expansion of this knowledge and technology.

Oil and gas bring new technology. The Senator mentioned directional drilling, for example, which is new technology being developed in our State and her State to bring opportunities that Shell gas is now doing—all kinds of opportunities.

When you think of the security level, I know the Senator from Colorado, our Presiding Officer here, has been in the Armed Services Committee, where we talk about this all the time. How do we get the biggest consumer—the military—to find new alternatives? And they are experimenting.

But what is amazing—and we heard it last week and the week before—is that our friends on the other side are wondering why the military is looking at alternative fuels. They actually asked, what gives you the authority to do that? Well, actually, when it costs you almost \$400 a gallon for diesel fuel on the front lines of Afghanistan, I think that is a good reason. They should be looking at what kinds of alternatives they can use.

I have seen what they are doing. They are doing some amazing things with solar panels and small devices. And what is important about that for the military is they can move more rapidly through areas so they won't have to worry about where is the diesel truck for energy. But for rural Alaska, it is important in our rural villages where it is \$10 or \$11 a gallon for heating fuel, and now there is technology that, instead of taking up a whole room, is portable, and they can move it, they can use it, and it saves consumers.

So there are all kinds of things we should be doing.

I know the other side will say: Those things cost too much; these things cost too much. When you are at the R&D stage, things always cost too much because you have to move slowly to develop and create the markets. But the military is a huge driver of a market, so I am excited that they are in these

areas. And I oppose the idea of some Republican Senators and House Members who are saying they shouldn't be doing anything experimental. Absolutely, they should. They are a consumer of the product. Let's have them give us some innovation.

People may forget that the same people who were doing the energy development in the early 1960s are the ones who started the Internet, from which we all now benefit. Imagine in the 1960s if we had said to the military: Oh, we don't want you testing whatever they were calling that Internet system. That is bad. You get out of that business. Where would we be today? Now, as the parent of a 9-year-old, I might have a different view on this. I may not want my son on the Internet. But it made a difference in our economy and everything else that is going on.

To conclude, I would say we have a chance to develop, to diversify, and to deliver a real energy plan if we focus on it. That is what we should be doing. So I thank my colleague from Louisiana, and I thank the Senator from Colorado, who is our Presiding Officer tonight, for allowing us to have a little rant time here in our own world. But I think the world we talk about is the same world almost everyone in America is living in, with high gas prices and wanting real solutions.

Anyone who says there is a magic bullet and the price will go down—that isn't happening. I support the Keystone Pipeline, and I know my colleague from Louisiana supports that, but that won't lower prices tomorrow. I support, for a variety of reasons, a long-term plan—jobs and other things—but it won't lower prices tomorrow. Drilling in Chukchi and Beaufort is important to me. I think in the long term it will create jobs and it will lower gas prices but not tomorrow. But these are the kinds of things we should be doing.

Will our investing in conservation to ensure that our commercial buildings and houses are more efficient turn a dollar right away? A little bit. But over the long haul—I am doing an energy retrofit to my house in Anchorage. I am going to save some money. It will go in and go out because I have to put some money aside for my son's education. But I will have more money. So it pays over time. Nothing happens overnight. It drives me crazy when I hear the other side say that this is like magic and tomorrow things will change. I wish that were the case. We all do. But we have to have a plan to get there.

I thank the Senator from Louisiana for joining me tonight. I thank her for standing tall when we took our vote yesterday. I think we made our point, and now we need to move forward, and hopefully we can get other people to follow our lead and do a comprehensive plan.

Ms. LANDRIEU. I thank the Senator.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ACT

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, while I am on the floor, I would like to speak for a few more minutes, if I might, on another subject but one that is equally important. The Senator from Alaska and I just spent some time talking about a balanced approach to energy production and the fact that if we could get there, we could create jobs. The Senator was saying that no matter what we do, it won't create jobs overnight, and he is right again. It will take a long time, it won't lower the price overnight, and it will create jobs.

But there is a bill that actually will create millions of jobs overnight that is pending, hanging around this Capitol, that if we could get passed would mean a great deal immediately—tomorrow, literally the day after the bill is signed by the President—and that, Mr. President, is the Federal highway transportation bill which last week was passed and compromised by one of the most liberal and progressive Members of this body and one of the most conservative Members of this body, Senator BOXER of California and Senator INHOFE of Oklahoma, who worked for over a year and a half to put a transportation bill together, a 2-year transportation bill. Many of us would have liked it to be 5 years or 6 years, but 2 years is what they could negotiate. And you know what, it is a lot better than the short-term 3-month, 6-month, 2-month, or 3-month temporary measures we have been under for the last several years. That gives no consistency—none—for our States and our counties and our cities.

If you talk about uncertainty, the business community, real estate developers, planners, community planners, transit planners—these entities do not know what it is going to look like 6 months from now or even next year. This bill would give at least 2 years of certainty, and then we could come back, hopefully, and pass a long-term extension of 5 years or 6 years. But 2 years is much better than 30 days or 60 days or 90 days, which is what the House is contemplating.

I am proud the Democrats and some Republicans are standing up in the House and saying no short-term extension. We have a bill. We have the Senate bill that got over 74 votes of Republicans and Democrats, compromised again between a more progressive and a more conservative Member for the benefit of our country.

There are 1.9 million jobs at stake. For the gulf coast Senators, there is an extra bonus. Besides funding our rail, our highways, and our transit, the gulf coast Senators and House Members from the States of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida got a very significant amendment to fund coastal restoration and flood control protection and economic development in the gulf coast, directing the fine money that is going to be levied against BP sometime in the next few weeks or months. Instead of that

money coming to the Federal Treasury to be spent on a variety of different things, it will stay where the injury occurred, along the gulf coast, and 80 percent of that money will stay in those coastal areas and those coastal States, helping our economies to revive ourselves and to save our coastlines.

So gulf coast House Members, I am speaking and hoping some of them will hear this message. Gulf coast House Members of either party, Democrats or Republicans, should stand tall and say: Yes, let's pass the Senate Transportation bill for the benefits that will come to our State and our Nation, creating or securing literally almost overnight 1.9 million jobs for the country, helping our recovery. But tucked into the Transportation bill is a bill that could bring billions of dollars to the gulf coast to help with coastal restoration and beach erosion.

I have seen the clips every day since we passed RESTORE, from Tampa, FL, to Mobile, AL, to Jackson, MS, to Gulfport, MS, to the Times Picayune in New Orleans, to the Houston Chronicle, and as faraway newspapers as the New York Times which have editorialized on: Pass the RESTORE Act now; bring jobs and economic relief to the gulf coast, an area and environment that has been hard hit by the 5 million barrels of oil that were spilled in the gulf. Next month, it will be the 2-year anniversary.

I don't know what the House of Representatives is thinking. They have a real jobs bill over there right now, voted on by Republicans and Democrats here, not just a few Republicans. I think more than half the Republicans in the Senate joined with us to pass this bill. In addition, it has the RESTORE Act in it. As the Presiding Officer knows, he had a great hand in supporting the part of that effort to fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund which will provide money to all the States for park restoration and maintenance and for land purchase with willing sellers.

So I am on the floor to support BARBARA BOXER, to support JIM INHOFE, to say to the House: Take the Senate Transportation bill. Take it now. It is good for all your States and for the gulf coast House Members particularly. The RESTORE Act is very bipartisan and bicameral. Theirs is a RESTORE Act very similar to ours. Please, let's join together, stop procrastinating, and pass this bill.

We have had many supporters of this bill. The chamber of commerce has put out messages to everyone today:

The Chamber strongly supports this important legislation . . . Passing surface transportation reauthorization legislation is a specific action Congress and the Administration can take right now to support job growth and economic productivity without adding to the deficit.

I wish to say one word about this extension. Extensions are not benign. As Senator BOXER told us today, extensions in some States aren't worth the

paper this extension will be written on because we know that most of these projects are funded by approximately 75 percent Federal money, 25 percent local. In the old days when States were flush with cash and people were running surpluses, when we messed up in Congress as we are messing up now and not giving them the Transportation bill on time, some of our States could just dip into their local money, keep their projects going, waiting for us to do our job.

Those days are over. Do you know any State in the Union running a massive surplus right now? Do you know any State anywhere? I don't. Because States have drawn down their reserves. They are running on very tight budgets because they are all coming out of this recession. Even our State that has a very low unemployment rate relative to everybody else, that never experienced the recession as everyone else did, is still running pretty sizeable deficits at the State level. I can tell you, my State doesn't have any extra cash to front the Federal Government.

When these projects run out and don't get reauthorized, a lot of these transportation projects will come to a halt. States will stop buying right-of-way. They will cancel or put on hold what is under contract until the money comes forward. So I am going to be in touch specifically with the State of Louisiana on how this is going to work in our State, but we were told today that there are a handful of States that have already started to put out notices to their contractors: There will be no more paychecks associated with this road project or this bridge project or this mass transit project.

Let me show everyone what I do know about our State. These are the grades we get from the Civil Engineering Association. I am not proud of these grades. But the reason I am not too embarrassed is because just about every State has these same grades because, overall, America's infrastructure generally is graded at a D. We are the most advanced country in the world but get a D rating when it comes to our infrastructure, surface transportation, water infrastructure, dams, levees, et cetera.

Our airports in Louisiana are C. Our levees, despite the huge investment the Federal Government has made recently, but because of the longstanding overall long-term disinvestment or lower investment over time, we still have a C. We have more bridge surface than almost any State in America—I think we are third—and we have a D-minus. We have more ports; in fact, Mississippi's southern port from Plaquemine to Baton Rouge is one of the largest in the world, definitely the largest in the country, a C-minus, and our roads are D.

Senator BOXER has been on the floor now all week, and I am joining her and helping her tell the House of Representatives they are playing with fire. They are playing with dynamite. We

have to get this Transportation bill out. I am sure other States can benefit from this bill. If we don't, this will be the ninth short-term extension since 2009.

People at home must think we have lost our minds. The clearest thing to people at home—they may not understand, and sometimes it is hard for us to understand, all the intricacies of every issue. But everyone in America, even our children understand that to build roads we need a road crew, to build bridges we need a bridge crew, to build mass transit we have to have people actually constructing. We need jobs in America right now, yesterday, today, immediately.

Why is the House of Representatives sitting on a bill that is paid for—contrary to some comments from House Members, paid for—that will go for 2 years? It is as long as I would like. It is not 4 years, it is not 5 years, but it is 2 years. It is longer than the 60-day, 90-day extensions we have been living under since 2009. It is 2012. Let's get a transportation bill.

My final point: For the gulf coast this is critical. We have a major piece of legislation tucked inside this bill. With the Transportation bill that the Senate passes, the RESTORE Act passes with it. We create an oceans trust fund, land and water conservation with willing seller provisions, and we invest billions of dollars in the gulf coast. It is a real jobs bill, not a pretend jobs bill. It is a real jobs bill. It means everything to our States. Whether one has a Republican or a Democratic Governor, they are waiting on us to pass this bill so they can get their people to work. I know mayors I have spoken to, police in our State, county commissioners are waiting for this money as well so they can get plans and put people to work.

So I most certainly hope that in the next 24 hours, before we leave on Friday, the House of Representatives will pass the Senate Transportation bill, send it over to us, and let's put our people to work. It is only going to last 2 years. We can argue about the differences, about how the money should go directly to the States. We could argue about mass transit. We can debate that for the next 2 years. Let's pass the bill. Let's get it done.

I yield the floor.

TRIBUTE TO SENATOR BARBARA MIKULSKI

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, with all of the very well deserved statements that have been made about our colleague Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, I wanted to raise my voice in support of the milestone she recently achieved as the longest-serving woman in congressional history.

A personal word I want to add about Senator MIKULSKI is that she has been so supportive and such a leader of our Nation's space program. As the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and